"My War in Spain."
Story Fragments.

NELSON

Some Haloed Correspondence

It was just a short while that I got the last letter back, although I hadn't been able to remember why it was the most important. At a party I found a beery dame halfway through her second husband, and she shrieked joyfully to learn I was still alive. She gave me her number but when I called she couldn't believe I just wanted the letter back. But she sent it to me; and when I got it I put the other four letters in a row on the desk, and put this letter at the end. I didn't want to reminisce, I wanted to learn. I knew the letters would help me find out who I had been (though I knew,) and who I was now (it was time to find out,) and how I got here. Because I had some decisions to make.

Dear Kitty,

There is obviously no clear reason for me to be writing to you, since we ~~par~~ the last time we saw each other it was hardly on the best of terms; however, we understood each other for all that. I was too fumblingly palsy-walsy with everybody my Freshman year and I guess you were too allfiredly aggressive about your Art and Sensitivity. But now we have both left the fountain of knowledge, perhaps finding it too like a sewer. A new bond between us.

Notice the postmark. Harken to the sweet, full note of altruism-- little me in Spain carrying a loaded gun and stuffing my belly with ~~pa~~ stale bread and bad pork and fine hopes about Democracy. ~~I wonder what made me write that~~ I bet you don't believe it. You're partly right.

It's taken several months for me to find out what I'm doing here. You see, I first thought I was here because of the Fascist skulduggery and stuff. That's not exactly true, although I'm sure you remember the persistence and lung power I put behind my good and true causes back home. I didn't come here to fight for Democracy in any real sense, I came here because I wanted to die for something. And I haven't even gotten the chance yet.

Whatever I ~~m~~ wrote to say I haven't managed to say ~~yet~~. ~~Example~~ I suppose you remember the misery session we had that night two years ago, with the pint of ~~the~~ whisky and the complaints of self-destruction and too many anxious kisses. You also remember all the people who kept saying nice things behind my back and expecting me to do great things. There was just one trouble. Every now and then I would remind myself that no matter what anybody thought, regardless of how I beat my chest, I wasn't going to do any great things. There have been bright loquacious do-nothings as long as there's been anything great that needed doing.

So I signed on the line and came here, and left several dozen people to sigh about how I was ~~the~~ throwing myself away. And I wrote this letter to remind myself that I

wasn't throwing myself away. I saved myself from failure.

End of my message to you. Except that at this moment I wanted to get a little philosophy on paper, the philosophy of the last six months. I guess it's more like a hormonal secretion than a creed, but I can put it into words anyway. It's just: do something, anything, hang onto who you are, find out who you are, make yourself some body, make yourself something, do something. So you can close your eyes and say, "it's done."

I hope you can understand what I just said. The wind of truth has passed me by and I don't really know just what I meant. Maybe it was just any wind, plain wind.

Goodbye,

Peter

That was the last letter. If I didn't get killed or any such thing; there was one minor skirmish before they pulled us back from the front, and the whole International Brigade was mustered out of Spain in a matter of days. That skirmish was an odd thing. I remember getting very angry because I wanted toshoot my gun but I couldn't see anything to shoot at./ It was only a few snipers, though, and after half an hour of scatteredshots they dragged out their bodies onto the side of the road and the dust settled on them as we marched away.

What made me angriest was that after all those letters I wanted somebodyto some of our men shoot at me.

Reading the letters reminded me of things, of course. But I hadn't forgotten very much. But when I finished reading I found out that I really had no decisions to make.

Five Letters from Spain

3, 5 Father
Kid brother
Grandfather
Mother
Aunt

3, 4 (1) 3

Inevitability of death accelerates.
Third letter is first hint.

Dear Eileen:

You're probably surprised to hear from me, I'm writing because you're the only girl I could write. There have been other girls closer to, but it was always pretty superficial. You and I, I hope, managed to establish a real communion. I wish it could have been longer for a longer time — and more extensive.

Maybe it surprises you, my being here. It won't if you think about it. ~~I feel that it's [illegible]~~ You know me. You've probably been aware of my search for 'something important' — at least that emptiness within me that I tried so hard to fill in so many ways. Different things I've done —

(con →→→)

Father:

You haven't heard much from me. This may be the last. If I die, and it's easily possible, I want you to understand why my life will not be wasted, or why I will be more happy than not.

The wonderful possibilities I had would never have been fulfilled. The last half dozen years I have been a walking failure. Failure has been more complete, more shattering because I knew it, was aware of every step. Comedy all life. Don't blame you. You know you better now than you may think, we very much alike. But you, in your driving failure have never stopped going, hoping. I have. That's why my failure is complete. I have wanted extinction - not once, but many

times, after starting a new. I can't really imagine what I would do if I came home.

But, in a way, I have found myself here. My whole life I have been grabbing for things to believe in. Even not. God, as long as it was something. Now I have found something. Now the war is going against us; our resources are getting shallow, and all we can do is hope. To me hope is different from anticipation; anticipation is when you have a chance. So, with a sad kind of desperation, we hope.

You still don't see, I suppose, why I'm ready to die. The last 2 nights I slept with a beautiful Spanish

girl who's on our side. She lost her parents. She is very lovely. I have a deep affection for her. I would marry her, but I would be powerless. We will spend time together, possibly to the end. We are staying in a little pensione with a lot of other soldiers and girls — half an hour ago we heard on the radio about ~~another defeat~~ more defeat now cities lost. The end may be coming, I think. The place where time comes to an end like a bricked-in window. When we all sat together downstairs and heard the news it was very sad — and very beautiful. Because we kept hoping. A little less, as hope gradually diminishes, into sad, s-

appointment. The disappointment will be sad because this is something we believe in. Whether we're dead or not doesn't matter. What I'm trying to make clear is the feeling that was among us ~~of love~~, of sadness, of hope, of resignation, of love -

~~So I am ready to die.~~

So I am ready to die. ~~So every~~

~~for~~ So every night I cleave to Josefa, and there is beauty in our love. So every day there is the fighting and the butchery - I will not tell you about that, because I have learned I am as much a butcher as any fascist. But I will

not talk about that. I know ~~them~~ that among them the fascists believe just as completely as we do, they feel an emp them the same warm dedication, except for them it is a growing excitement and exhilaration — I think I know what it is like and I envy them that.

But let me say some closing ~~kind~~ kind of thing, father. I don't want to be melodramatic, but if this is the last you hear of me I want you to have understood me. I have been lonely all my life. Part of every day has been desperation and defeat. I would never write a fine

novel or do anything wonderful — I'm too apathetic within myself. My ideas were trite, my ambitions were worthless. It was important to me to do something worthwhile, for my own self-respect. And this was the only thing I could do, & would do. I take a childish pleasure in the idea of ~~having~~ those friends I did have finding out about me from one another. I've written the rest of the family.

To sum: when I die, my life will be no more wasted than it ever was.

Here, I have found love, courage, belief. This is all the fulfillment I ever wanted. The futility is unimportant — because these things are subjective

and they satisfy me.

Last, let me make clear how much I love you. That love has turned from the awe and embarrassment of my childhood to an understanding and a gratitude — with sympathy. I understand you, I understand your failures and I am sorry. And I thank you for all that you were able to give me. Isn't it ironic how I never got the chance to tell you before!

Take care of yourself. Please. Let this be a kind of command. You're my posterity — how backward! Make me proud. I do love you.

All my love to the ones around you, too.

Ted

Grandfather:

The question is, what does it mean to fulfill your life? I know what it meant for you. I know what you wanted it ~~to~~ mean for me. But changes come with time, and a change has come to me: I am newly fulfilled in ways I would not have expected, and I will allow them to suffice. I am now one with all the martyrs and visionary fools and ~~revolutionaries and~~ believers and fighters for causes that have ever been. And what is my justification of it? A new change

will come in eleventy years and wipe out the good ~~and~~ or the bad, whoever, is ahead now. I ~~have a little~~ know enough of my coordinates in history to know that this cause is not the last cause, and that this cause will not last. I have other justification for what I do than the consequences. A lot of us believe that we can shape the earth a little and bring about great eventual happiness if ~~this thing we are giving birth to comes to being.~~ I went along for quite a time with a flaccid conscience, ~~that~~ knowing straight through me the relativity of right and wrong; and yet I was slow at last to espouse something and say, 'This is right; this I believe; for this, I will take a beating

The Communists, especially, believe this. There are a lot of them here. Their fatality of faith is majestic. I don't think I am a Communist; but I am on their side because they, at least believe in human dignity and the potentialities of man on earth.

guilt and ~~[illegible]~~ about the people I have decided to call my enemies.

The end, I realize, is unimportant — the actual effect, victory or loss, will be cosmically significant and historically minor. What matters is the means. The means is my self-respect. I have chosen the way that I can believe — at last — for the first time — completely in what I do.

You ask me to apologize for being here. You make it the squandering of my life. It is not; but I understand you. I know how much involved you were with my life. I can't remember back as far. But I remember many things. The years in the same house, the picnics at the farm, the wonderful

walks in the woods. ... Those walks were really important to me. There was a great deal between us that didn't need ~~need~~. all of us
and wonderful feeling among us; and if your grandmother Joan, the family
there were misunderstandings, too, I think we can write them off as unimportant. As a family we had some lovely moments. ~~[illegible]~~ It's wrong, in a way, to wish it could have gone on, because we can't make anything go on forever.

But I know you are disappointed and so I do apologize. All you have carefully, lovingly, put into my life you see me throw away. But I am grateful. Understand! I am grateful for all you gave me.

I thank you. ~~[illegible]~~

Now I am not throwing it away. There is a small difference, a shift of emphasis from the futile to the purposeful I am giving it away. I am giving it away to people who need it at a time they need it — and if the ~~gesture~~ gift seems useless, then understand that I would want it known I had made the gift. Known to whom, I am not sure; most probably, to myself.

If you still think of this as empty heroics, then I have failed in communication with you. Then remember, at least, the good times we had together the way I remember them now; and I hope you will find they were worth the cost, as I have found. That your hopes have not achieved a more permanent

fruition, I am sorry - but the past is an involuntary gift of one generation to the next, to expend as desired. Let me explain that I treasure your care of me greatly; and know that I treasure the cause as much.

Words. Listen. I love you. I love grandmother Joan. Know I believed I was right.

Ted

to EILEEN)

that time I tried to seduce you in the graveyard. It's funny — I've grown tremendously affectionate toward you, and I think it may date from that moment. It was exactly then that I realized you had never been kissed before. I felt tremendously exalted that ~~you~~ should give yourself to me then, even to that extent; I felt possessive, too, that ~~you~~ I had kissed you and that was fine ~~because~~ but there was no telling who else might. So I put you back against the tombstone and looked at you for a minute and looked at the Time around us — it was beautiful; you were beautiful (I read it

noticed till then. You hadn't been beautiful till then.) and in a little while we both rode my bicycle back to the camp. The ocean was roaring like a couple of hells, too - there was a hurricane a hundred miles down the coast and somehow the whole ocean roared - and you and I were both very happy without being in love. It was marvelous.

You know, also, how there were other girls that summer - how wildly I tried to fill myself with love, and what a thumping failure that was. Maybe you didn't know that. It probably looked, that

summer, as though [illegible] Alice and I were going the gamut together. Well, whatever we did, it was meaningless; and with her, as with the other girls at home, there was a barrier — a feeling of emptiness that appeared when we looked at each other and there was nothing meant, nothing communicated. And each time another girl was unsatisfactory I got more frightened, that I would never find a girl who would with whom to have meaning, a girl who would be enough,,, and at last here, there have been women [illegible] who were enough, who were able to

to dry up the springs of longing, just for a while. Only, I think, because now I care a little less. Somewhere else has been the completion I needed. And with them I have found a kind of excited contentment. ~~That is,~~ I suppose it's a kind of exhaustion. And I can relax, in a new, funny place inside me that I never noticed the tension.

This is the third letter I've written, now, that I've had a special intent in mind: I'm writing now to the people I was close to, to let them know a little more about me than they did before. ~~You see, I think I'm going~~ I want to leave myself

behind, in a way, to let the people who ~~knew~~ cared about me, and never knew about me, find out something more. To explain my being here. And as a kind of thanks.

War is something the way I expected it because I never actually had anything in mind. Spain is very beautiful. And then we go through it and ~~shoot~~ kill people and settle down a good long while and hear about the killing elsewhere, and then we kill some more. In the ways everyone talks about it is terrible, and yet it's a funny kind of fulfillment. That's a ~~be~~ trial thing to say, and it's a

bestial kind of fulfillment; it's a new, strange, very old scene of life, where you are here and the thing you are fighting is there, and you can point at it and shoot at it and run away from it. The strangest thing, to me, is knowing just what it is.

Anyway, I wanted to give you my best. I love you, in an asexual kind of way. Though not necessarily.

I'll call you as soon as I get home.

Mother —

[redacted]

~~Listen~~

I haven't got time to really write to you and tell you what has happened. It isn't really necessary, anyway. We have understood each other very well for a long time, and I think we have been lonely for each other - for some twenty years. But between us a great deal has passed clearly. There is less you need to hear from me than do others. Right now I must act as though time is short; it may be. Perhaps it is simplest to say, simply, I reiterate, all the [redacted]

Mother

feeling that was between us when I saw you last - I love you - and that last moment I saw you, when you told me not to go, and I went - was another step in the succession of things that has frustrated us, singly and together, all our lives. It isn't irony or tragedy or anything - it's event - and enough people's lives have been shredded asunder in the world that we can be saddened in the impersonal, and only quietly disappointed when the statistics come groping ~~of us~~.

This letter is short. The International Brigade is suffering 50% casualties. I ~~must~~ must ~~to~~ settle ~~down~~ with several other people. You and I are settled.

I do love you.

Ted

Don't be sorry for whatever guilt you may feel over me. ~~I know~~ Responsibility is a ~~creation~~ legal fiction. I know how much you have done, and wanted to do. I remember the phone call I made to you from college a couple of months before I left. You found out that I was unhappy. When we were saying goodbye I could tell by the quality of your voice that you were crying - but there was nothing for me to say. You had felt failure, and I could not deny it. The judgment was in you and not in me. Nobody ever failed at anything. They were prevented.

Dear Pete.

This is something I picked up in a shop over here. It's kind of a stupid toy but I thought you might get a laugh out of it. I'm not sure if you understand where I am or what I'm doing. Let me explain something about this war business. You have a gun in your hands and when someone tells you to go somewhere you go that way and shoot anybody who tries to stop you. If you get sent ahead like that the chances are about one in five that you'll come back. You don't have anything to say about it. I thought you'd want to understand. There isn't any comic book hero stuff. Other people make my choices for me. Other people decide who will get killed and who will get a chance to be a hero. Looking at it that way, every soldier is a hero. So it's a useless word.

Let me tell you something about your life. ~~I've learned that my life~~ You're very much like me, and I've learned some things about myself. Don't fool around with dumb projects or get mixed up in a lot of crap. Your life is with other people, and without them you are something less. You will never be really happy by yourself.

Thanks very very much for your letter. I really appreciated hearing from you.

Let me tell you a few things about myself. I want you to really get to know me. Anyway I wanted to tell these things to somebody, and I knew you would understand better than anybody else.

I'm kind of a lonely person. I always have been a little bit. I know you're the same way. Well, I've fallen in love with a lot of different girls, over the years. It never did me much good. The last one was a girl named Carol. She was very beautiful. She had white hair among the black. I haven't seen her for a couple of years. I think she still lives on West End Avenue.

I used to look forward to an awful lot. Sometimes I was very conceited; I thought I was very smart because I scored

Let me tell you a few things about myself.
I want you to really get to know me, that's
why I wanted to tell these things to you first
and I know you would rather hear it from
them anybody else.

I'm kind of a lonely person. I always have
been a little bit. I think you'll see why
well. I've fallen on long periods of
different parts, over the years. It never
did me much good. The last one was a
real mental one. She was my best friend
She kept asking me for a couple of months
I didn't give it to her. I kept thinking
lot. Sometimes I was very much
thought I was very much

high on some tests once. Just the last month or two I've decided it doesn't matter what you can do it's what you do do, so the tests didn't make any difference. But every now and then I would remember them just to feel good.

I don't know anything I can say to you in particular. I wish I'd seen more of you. I was getting to like you, beside loving you as a brother. When I get back I am looking forward to having you as a real friend.

If I don't get back or write very soon, you're welcome to look around in some of my old letters. You might get to understand me and why I'm like I am, ~~if you ever do~~ It would be a kind of brotherly advice for you to see the friends I had and the mistakes I made. Take good care of yourself.

Ted

UCH [redacted] CHEATED
Get Juice and Soul on me

"My War in Spain"

FLOODED